

APPENDIX I  
VEGETATION SURVEY

Baseline Description of  
a  
Native Sagebrush/Grass Reference Area  
at

Wildcat Loadout  
(PR 007/033)  
NW 1/4 SE 1/4, T. 13 S., R. 9 E.  
Carbon County, Utah

for  
Andalex Resources, Inc.  
P.O. Box 902  
Price, Utah 84501

by  
Nicholas S. Van Pelt\*

August 16, 1988

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\*Currently temporary research assistant, Dept. of Range Science, Utah State University, Logan 84322-5230; (801) 750-2100, 750-2471. He holds a doctoral degree (1988) in range ecology from the same institution, and specializes in inventory and management problems of pinyon pine-juniper woodlands. His dissertation research was conducted at sites 4 miles west of the location reported herein, and at additional, long-term sites elsewhere in Carbon County.

All fieldwork and analysis was performed by the author. No work connected with this report was done on Utah State University time, nor with USU vehicles.

## Introduction

This report is based on a one-day (August 15, 1988) visit to a reference area identified by Andalex and the Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining (hereinafter DOGM) on public (BLM) land 100 yards west of the southern coal stockpile. Work consisted of establishing a measured area perimeter marked at four corners, qualitatively describing the features of the site, obtaining voucher plant specimens, and estimating plant and surficial cover, shrub density, and mean shrub height. Since the area is for reference purposes, no productivity estimates were required from this initial description (DOGM, 1982). However, the recently-published soil survey for the area (Jensen and Borchert 1988) was consulted to learn the range of productivity to be expected for this SCS range site in a relatively dry year.

## Location, Soils, and Range Site

The reference area occupies a parcel of typical native range unaffected by coal operations and other ground-disturbing activities. It lies just east of the north-south fence bounding the east side of the loadout area, but is currently unfenced. A low-standard dirt road passes just below (within 40 feet of) the area, affording easy access but not otherwise affecting it. The legal location is the NW 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of section 33, township 13 south, range 9 east, Salt Lake Base and Meridian (see Plate 1 of Mining and Reclamation Plan).

As currently marked, the reference area is rectangular, 300 by 160 feet, with the short sides perpendicular to the contour. The area's size is thus about 48,000 square feet, or 1.10 acre. All observations and sampling were confined to this tract, but the resultant estimates and descriptions apply (except for the drainageway to the north and the disturbed area to the west) to the land encircling this perimeter.

The terrain is convex, faces east-southeast, and has two small, non-incised gullies. The elevation is approximately 6170 feet, with only a 10 to 12-foot difference from the top to the bottom of the area. Slopes range from nearly level to about 8%.

The soil underlying the site belongs to the Hernandez family (Jensen and Borchert, 1988, page 294), and is a fine-loamy, mixed, mesic, Ustollic Calciorthid. The map unit, 52 (sheet 8 of the soil survey), is in the Semidesert Loam (Wyoming Big Sagebrush) range site. This unit extends well beyond the reference area, signifying that the area, while small, is not atypical of the surrounding soils. The Hernandez soil family and its capabilities are described in detail in the new survey (Jensen and Borchert, 1988), especially on page 45. The geology is alluvium mainly derived from sandstone and shale.

The natural vegetation that typifies the Hernandez soil corresponds very strongly to that currently occupying the reference area.

## Land Use and Animal Influences

Although unaffected by coal operations, the reference area is grazed and browsed by cattle, sheep, and mule deer, with most use occurring in fall and winter. Cattle use, judged by manure, ground conditions, and plant composition, is probably very light or incidental, whereas signs of sheep and deer use are considerably more evident. Both sheep and deer pellets are abundant, and two Utah juniper just off the area were severely "high-lined" by wintering deer. However, there are no bed grounds or any other sign of unusual livestock or deer concentrations, such as severe browsing, patches of weed, or devegetated ground.

No vegetation or land treatments (spraying, disking, chaining) have been imposed on the area or its surroundings, nor have non-native forage plants been accidentally or deliberately established on the area.

The reference area serves as habitat for cottontail rabbits and prairie dogs. There was no evidence whatsoever of recent grasshopper depredations. Refer to page 195 of the soil survey for wildlife habitat evaluations of this soil family.

## Vegetation and Surficial Conditions

The plant community is dominated by big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata subspecies wyomingensis and tridentata) and Indian ricegrass (Oryzopsis hymenoides), both common, native species. Subordinate species include galleta (Hilaria jamesii), winterfat (Eurotia lanata), pricklypear (Opuntia sp.), low rabbitbrush (Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus), downy brome (Bromus tectorum), and needleandthread (Stipa comata). Other, much less abundant species and genera noted in the area were:

### Trees and shrubs:

Juniperus osteosperma (Utah juniper) -- one sapling, 4.5' high  
Pinus edulis (Two-needle pinyon) -- one seedling

### Forbs:

Descurainia sp. (Tansymustard)  
Plantago sp. (Woolly indianwheat)  
Machaeranthera sp.  
Oysterplant (Tragopogon sp.) -- two plants

### Grasses:

Sitanion hystrix (bottlebrush squirreltail)  
Crested wheatgrass (Agropyron cristatum) -- one plant

These minor species would not be encountered during normal sampling intensities, are of little importance in the plant community, and show no

signs of increasing. Furthermore, not all of them would necessarily be found on an equivalent-sized area of this rangeland type, whether natural or reclaimed. Both pinyon and juniper trees grow close to the reference area, but are not invading it.

Specimens of most species were collected, and some identifications were made with the assistance of the USU Extension Range Management Specialist. After a close search, no extraordinary plant taxa were observed within the area or around its perimeter, so a negative declaration regarding T & E species is warranted. The Gordon Creek/Wildcat Canyon area is not a known locality for endemic or unusual plants.

Much of the soil surface is bare, but there are no signs of accelerated erosion nor of deposition of soil fines from the adjacent coal area. Thin traces of coal dust have been deposited on the surface, but their occurrence is very slight. Moderate sheetwash is the only apparent influence on the surface; neither rilling, pronounced pedestaling of shrubs, nor incipient gullyng are evident. At the same time, seasonal crusting of the soil may limit establishment of new plants, and there is no microphytic (mosses, algae, and lichens) soil crust whatsoever.

#### Vegetation Cover and Shrub Density

*Field notes indicate 40m transects. Notes were requested. Associated later at 200m request. Length was likely a mistake.*

Fifteen (15) 40-foot (13 m) transects were established throughout the area to estimate cover by line interception (Canfield 1941). Random numbers (Steel and Torrie 1980) were used to determine x-y coordinates and transect orientation. Other work had shown that this sampling intensity (about 100 m of line per acre) would yield reasonably precise estimates of the major cover forms. The following results were obtained:

#### Percent Cover

Form & Species	Mean	Std. Deviation	80% Confidence Interval
Ground Surface			
Bare ground	68.1	10.5	64.5 - 71.8
Litter	10.2	6.5	8.0 - 12.4
Shrubs			
Sagebrush	8.7	6.9	6.3 - 11.1
Winterfat	0.7	1.1	0.3 - 1.1
Rabbitbrush	0.5	0.9	0.2 - 0.8
Grasses			
Indian ricegrass	3.5	2.9	2.5 - 4.5
Galleta	6.2	11.0	2.4 - 10.1
Downy brome	0.5	1.8	-0.1 - 1.1
Needleandthread	0.6	0.9	0.3 - 0.9
Other			
Pricklypear	0.2	0.5	0.1 - 0.4

*20.9*

The two subspecies of sagebrush apparently present (Wyoming and basin) were not distinguished during sampling. The former seems to occupy slightly shallower soils on the interfluvies, in a nearly monotypic stand, whereas the latter grows taller and in closer association with other species. However, there is little basis for demarcating two different shrub communities.

Shrub (woody plant) density was estimated with the point-centered quarter method (Cottam and Curtis, 1956; DOGM, 1982), using seventy (70) randomly placed points and measuring distance to plant stems to the nearest inch. The combined density of sagebrush (all sizes, both apparent species), winterfat, and rabbitbrush was estimated as 5,384 plants/acre (80% confidence interval of 4,094 to 7,862 plants/acre).

A supplemental (non-required) measurement taken to help describe the community and its "relative maturity" was a large sample of mature sagebrush heights:

Sample Size	Mean Height ("	St. Dev.	80% Confidence Interval
90	24.7	12.0	24.0" - 25.3"

Thus, the dominant sagebrush plants vary little in height. Very few displayed inflorescences, a possible consequence of browsing pressure. However, sagebrush seedlings are easily abundant enough to ensure perpetuation of the stand for the foreseeable future. Overall, the reference area supports a multi-sized, multi-aged sagebrush component. Although there are a few dozen dead sagebrush crowns, by no means is the stand declining or decadent. Combined cover of shrubs does not surpass 20%, but the area should be classed as "shrubland" (West 1983).

No productivity estimates were obtained, as they were not required and the cool-season grasses were well past maturity whereas the galleta had not headed out in response to summer rains. The SCS (Jensen and Borchert, 1988, page 166) states that 500 lb/acre of dry weight forage can be expected in an "unfavorable" year from this range site. At the time of sampling, certainly no more than this was available from all species, and production of palatable grasses on the area would not have exceeded 250 lb/acre. Depending on the class of livestock or big game using the area, its condition would be rated between "fair" and "good" -- certainly neither "poor" nor "excellent". The trend, as judged by the lack of tree invasion, grass reproduction, and the quantity and vigor of winterfat plants, is at least stable or slightly upward. Both sagebrush reproductive effort and winterfat numbers might increase after fencing.

In conclusion, the reference area appears to meet important criteria of representativeness, current range condition, typical levels of production, and lack of exogenous disturbances from the loadout operation or other cultural activities. There are no signs whatever of imminent or long-term change away from its current appearance and composition.

## References and Background Literature

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9. Stevens, R., and E. D. McArthur. 1974. A simple field technique for identification of some sagebrush taxa. *Journal of Range Management*, volume 27, pages 325-326.
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11. West, N. E. 1983. Great Basin-Colorado Plateau sagebrush semi-desert. Chapter 12 (pages 331-349) in N.E. West, editor Temperate Deserts and Semi-Deserts. Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam.

10/14/88

Wednesday, October 12, 1988  
Logan, Utah

Mr. Michael Glasson  
Tower Division  
Andalex Resources, Inc.  
P. O. Box 902  
Price, Utah 84501

Dear Mike:

As you requested earlier this morning, here are the field data sheets I retained from the August work at the Wildcat loadout reference area. The Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining guidelines do state that the consultant should be prepared to submit copies of the data sheets used in the field. I am happy to do so, and I apologize for not thinking of this earlier when I sent the report.

After your call, I took the time to write out and attach explanatory notes to the field forms, which are otherwise unedited and might be hard for a reader to understand. I have also tried to remedy any legibility problems possibly caused by my back problem on the day of the visit. I did not keep verbal field notes nor plant voucher specimens past the week in September when I said I was available for a followup visit; those were discarded in connection with a general cleanup of outdated files and specimens at the lab where I work.

You may wish to retain a photocopy of the sheets while sending the originals on to the state, with or without this letter. If I need to stop by Price in the near future, call me at 750-2471 and I'll get in touch with you about an early November date -- I'll be going through Price enroute to Moab, probably on the 7th.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

*Nick Van Pelt*

Nicholas Van Pelt

Attachments



October 12, 1988

Explanatory notes to accompany field data sheets and computer printouts  
--- in connection with Nicholas Van Pelt's report to Andalex  
Resources concerning the small Wildcat loadout reference area,  
mid-August, 1988.

Overall: .

1. The two required estimates were for ground-surface and plant species cover, and for density of the major shrubs. The respective techniques used were line-intercept ("LI") and point-centered-quarter method ("PCQM").
2. For sample locations, I used coordinates generated from a random-numbers table in a standard statistics book (see photocopy). This is standard procedure, in preference to spacing line ends or plot centers systematically (for example, every 5 meters or 3 yards) or subjectively (choosing the placements to be "representative" or "typical").
3. Printouts are from MINITAB statistical package runs.

Refer to explanations attached to the sheets for the particular analysis.



Line-intercept field sheets and computer printout (first stapled set).

There is no standard field sheet that I know of for recording line-intercept data. The sheets used here show a species or ground-cover category (see explanation of abbreviations, below) on the left and right sides, with new categories added as encountered. Each division, of the 80 total, represents one-half meter. The cover estimated along the tape for each species or other form of cover is represented by the penciled line segments. The total length of the segments for each cover category was added up, and then converted to percentages of the total line length (40 meters) for that transect. The percentages for each cover category for all transects were next entered into a computer data file, and the statistics shown were readily generated. All the means should add up to virtually 100.00 percent; in this instance, the total (C1 through C10) was 99.39%.

Abbreviations	Species or Other Category	Printout Code
"bq"	bare ground	C1
"ltr"	plant litter	C2
"At"	<u>Artemisia tridentata</u>	C3
"ukg"	Unknown grass, later identified as galleta	C4
"Orhy"	<u>Oryzopsis hymenoides</u>	C5
"Cela"	<u>Ceratoides lanata</u>	C6
"Chry"	<u>Chrysothamnus</u> spp.	C7
"Cact"	Cactus, later identified as <u>Opuntia</u> sp.	C8
"Brte"	<u>Bromus tectorum</u>	C9
"Stco"	<u>Stipa comata</u>	C10















Density of the most prominent shrub species (second stapled set).

Once a random point had been located via coordinates, four 90-degree quadrants were established with a round sampling ring having four spokes, again with the divisions among them determined randomly (for example, compass bearing of 136 degrees as determining the dividing line between the upper left and upper right quadrants). On the data sheets, the quadrants were coded as follows:

"UL" means upper left

"UR" means upper right

"LR" means lower left

"LL" means lower left

Distances to the nearest plant of the species in that quadrant were recorded in the appropriate column. "At" means Artemisia (sagebrush species), "Cela" means Ceratoides lanata (winterfat) above the column for averages. For each point, "MAP" means mean area per plant, subsequently used (per the grand mean; see printouts) in the formula supplied in the DOGM guidelines. Note that winterfat were so sparse that they only occurred within a reasonable distance of the point in 10 of the samples, whereas sagebrush were within about 116" (about 10 feet) in all samples.

nearby

Estimation of mean heights of mature sagebrush -- optional measure (final sheet, not stapled).

Computer printout; I do not have the field sheet.





PC Q. 1  
P. 3  
15.0

	UL	UR	LR	LL	At AjX	Ce6 Aj	At MAP	Ce6 MAP
1	3	4	16	9	7		.5	
2	6	2	13	10	6		.4	
3	12	24	27	30	1.7		3.6	
4	21	41	39	79	1.7		13.7	
5	15	77	71	79			25.0	
6	11	65	17	17	3		5.3	
7	5	7	10	12	.7		.5	
8	10	27	8	35	1.1		2.9	
9	17	20	12	22			2.3	
10	12	11	12	12	1.6		1.0	
11	16	4	17	9	1.0		1.0	
12	13	46	49	7	2.4		5.8	
13	60	16	58	43	1.7		13.7	
14	22	20	39	13	2.1		4.0	
15	4	6	6	5	6.4		.2	
16	14	9	27	17	1.4		2.0	
17	29	40	63	32	1		11.5	
18	116	59	72	25	1.6		31.3	
19	53	26	52	30			10.9	
20	19	46	112	45	1	3.7	24.0	13.
21	25	144	137	55	2.0	3.8	4.0	14.
22	60	76	13	20	2.3		5.3	
23	5	8	6	15	.7		.5	
24	19	16	12	23	1.4		2.0	
25	21	30	37	27	2.4		5.8	
26	10	29	20	50	2.3		5.3	
27	19	15	13	6	.9	1.6	.8	2.
28	4	1	6	18	.6		.4	
29	32	16	14	18	1.7		2.9	
30	2	5	16	5	.6		.4	
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